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TO THE
C L E R G Y

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OF THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

L O N D O N :

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MDCC LXXXI.

LETTER

TO THE

CLERGY



OF THE

CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

LONDON:

Printed for J. Johnson, St. Paul's Church-yard, and R. B. Smith, Old Bailey.

MDCCLXXXII.

A
L E T T E R,
&c.

TRULY REVEREND BRETHREN,

AN obscure individual, who is conscious of his own unworthiness of being accounted one of your sacred order, could never presume to call your attention to the sentiments this letter is intended to convey, but from the sincere hope of exciting the most able and venerable among you to the prevention of evils

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with which the malignant aspect of the present time apparently threatens the established church. To the observation and experience of every one of you, an appeal is made respecting their existence, their increase and magnitude : it is made out of sincere attachment to our civil and religious establishment ; and such a regard for the dignity of the pastoral character, as every man must entertain who is well disposed towards the church of England. The writer depends on your acknowledged liberality for an excuse for his temerity, in submitting to
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you his observations and opinions on this subject.

The connection between ecclesiastical and civil government is necessarily so strict, that the distinction of parties in the state must ever be most powerful in the bias of mens minds towards particular opinions in points of religion. Few are endowed with a sufficient share, either of wisdom or fortitude, to enable them to relieve their religious notions entirely from the influence of temporal and interested considerations ; and it is to be apprehended, that the defence of religious principles is as frequently

made an instrument of civil opposition, as it is the real cause for which such contention is undertaken and continued. On this account, men of every description that can be found, between the two extremes of licentious infidelity and abject superstition, connect themselves in such a manner as will apparently contribute most to their present prospects or emoluments; which seem easily reconcilable, as they flatter themselves with religious or moral principles. In a country where toleration and liberty are extended to the utmost, opposite arrangements

arrangements of men and opinions will openly take place; and there will even accrue some advantage to the established church, from the attention which its ministers must consequently preserve towards the operations of its various and numberless opponents: but there will also grow this unavoidable inconvenience, that they will be exposed to all the cruelty of wanton defamation from many of the adversaries of the establishment. If this went no farther than to the affliction and trial of the immediate sufferers, we know in what manner they
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are bound to endure it; but when it tends to the subversion of the church, whose ministers they are, and sometimes even to that of the whole system of revealed religion, there is no precaution too wise that can be taken, no attention too strict that can be given, no perseverance too zealous that can be maintained toward the prevention of so dreadful an effect.

The last resource of disputants, whose positions or whose arguments are weak, is abuse of their opponents ; hence arise the variety of calumnies devised and
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disperſed againſt the friends or miniſters of the goſpel, the numerous attempts to ſow diſſenſion among them, and the miſ-representations of their principles, and views, and conduct, which are artfully calculated, if not to ſet them at variance, at leaſt to ſeparate them as far as poſſible. He who is an enemy to the head, knows very well that ſchiſms among the members promote moſt effectually his evil deſigns.

It is an idea which obtains among many very learned men, that the Chriſtian Church, in
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its present state, undergoes many persecutions, of a different species indeed from those which afflicted it in its infancy, but not less dangerous or prejudicial to its welfare ; that they are of a treacherous nature, approaching by unexpected avenues, and often producing their baneful effects before they are discovered. Attempts to injure Christianity, by attacks on the characters of its ministers, are not the least formidable of these contrivances ; and though the thinking part of mankind are aware of the futility of the argument, which is founded on such pretences

tences ; it is certain, that the generality are wonderfully misled by this shadow of reasoning.

It would be impertinent to attempt giving any new information on these points, to those from whose experience and observation the author might, undoubtedly, derive much knowledge ; the following instances are therefore offered only as an appeal to both, in proof of the detriment sustained by the church, by the industrious calumniators of its injured ministers.

Certain sectaries very frequently declare their belief, that the most attentive and exemplary of the clergy cherish in their own minds those very opinions which occasion the difference between their sect and the established church; whatever may be the doctrines these clergymen profess privately, or teach in public. They ascribe this disagreement between their principles and conduct to the infirmity of human nature, a dread of singularity, or an attachment to temporal honour or emolument. While they thus endeavor to establish their own particular

particular tenets upon the authority of men acknowledged to be respectable in point of understanding and character, they detract from the weight of such doctrines as it is the duty and the endeavor of those very ministers to inculcate, by casting imputations on the purity of their intentions, the sincerity of their professions, and their well-grounded and regulated zeal. Sometimes these assertions are of a general nature, and extend to the whole body of the clergy of the established church; sometimes are particular, and levelled against certain eminent persons.

In this latter case, they are supported commonly upon some sentence in a discourse or publication, unfairly detached from the context, some charitable exchange of the duties of Christianity between these ministers and the advocates for such principles, some notion, assumed concerning their inclination to certain political parties, and even sometimes upon a mere opinion, hastily and partially adopted, of their dispositions and characters diametrically opposite to the real nature of both. However it may be, the attention always paid to remarkable persons,

sons, and the envy inseparably attendant on merit, produce an avidity of learning whatever degrades illustrious men, of which these sectaries avail themselves with very great success toward the propagation of their favourite opinions. As an instance, out of many, in proof of what has been asserted; the clergy of the Church of England, are very frequently, and very falsely accused of deviating from those articles which they subscribed previous to ordination; and Calvinistical teachers, in particular, bring this accusation against them, affirming, that

that with respect to the doctrinal points of predestination, election, and reprobation, *they* preach more conformably to the articles than the clergy themselves. Frequent sermons upon those doctrinal points in which they dissent from us, explaining the sense of our church concerning them, appear, with all submission to your wisdom and judgment, of great importance, not only to our vindication from this aspersión, but to prevent a misapprehension in our hearers, that those teachers differ in these points rather from us, than from the church whose articles we have subscribed.

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Diffensions between ministers of the established church, are, it is to be feared, frequently and successfully attempted to be sown by the enemies of its peace and honor. Even concerning the discharge of our important duties, opposite opinions will unavoidably arise ; and our enemies will not fail to take advantage from those infirmities which are part of our nature. If we contend together, it is to be apprehended, that obstinacy, or a desire of superiority, will often not only prevent the discovery of truth, but divert our pursuit of it to personal enmity
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and rivalry. This is a situation to which the enemies of the establishment, and the enemies of revelation love to reduce us : when this is once effected, the former declare triumphantly, that the gospel is not of contention ; the latter, that a plan of religion must be ill contrived, which cannot produce in the very teachers of it, the meekness and humility which it assumes as characteristics.

If dissensions among us, originate from opposition of temporal interests, the adversaries never fail to exaggerate firmness
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into obstinacy, the defence of right, into usurpation ; and the most just prosecution of it, into fraudulent rapacity. Men always will prefer a comparative view of their own conduct with that of others, to an application of the strait rule of right to the crookedness of their ways ; and deviations from the line of rectitude by teachers, are too flattering and encouraging, not to be attended with avidity, or even feigned with ingenuity by all who want a more rational vindication of themselves.

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Hence the common and almost unavoidable failings of human nature are founded abroad; the perfections of an exemplary conduct are disregarded, except by a small company of those who must immediately reap advantage from it; while others ascribe to austerity, or perhaps to hypocrisy, virtues whose lustre dazzles and afflicts them.

If the practice of religious and moral duties is considerably relaxed, as well as the faith of the weaker brethren debilitated through these unjust representations

presentations of the conduct of individuals engaged in the ministry, it is undoubtedly an object of the highest concern, and an essential branch of our duty to prevent the unwary and undesigning from being misled by these iniquitous impositions on their credulity.

And as it has pleased God to call us to the labor of his vineyard, and to the performance of his great and glorious work, not only the example we should afford, but the effectual discharge of our duty, demands from us such an union with

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each

each other in Christ, as will prevent our hearing with patience, much more our attending with satisfaction to reports, or surmises, or insinuations against each other, which may tend to alienate the disciple from the teacher, to diminish confidence, or undermine authority. I cannot be so much mistaken, I hope, as to be supposed even to hint, that the charity which covereth a multitude of sins, should be prostituted to sanctify them in the very instances wherein they are least to be excused; if the accusation is direct and well supported, the utmost that
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can be done, is to remind our hearers of the distinction between the perfection of Christ's doctrine, and the infirmities from which we all feel, but too sensibly, the task of propagating it, exempts no man : but if the accusation appears plainly to derive its origin from disaffection to religion, or our national church, an abhorrence of all controul, and an attachment to immorality ; if we perceive that men are studious thus to deceive themselves, to vindicate an ill conduct on the authority of bad examples, or absurdly to throw an imputation on revealed religion,

ligion, on account of the misconduct of the defenders of it ; and if we discover, as we generally must when such is the motive, that truth is violated in the reports which are circulated, and received with avidity ; there can be no doubt, whether or not, the discouragement of them is incumbent on us, and worthy of the employment of our best discretion, and most active perseverance. For reports of this nature receive additional strength even from the silent attention of men of character, and are from that moment dispersed with an apparent sanction, when once they have

have proceeded as far as into the presence of a man of this description, without being stigmatized with his disapprobation. It is very often sufficient to overthrow the objections raised against particular persons, to enquire into the authority on which they are founded, and enquiries of this nature are consistent with the utmost moderation and meekness of spirit ; and it would be, most certainly, unbecoming to divest ourselves of these, even when we are engaged in this important defence of our calumniated brethren. But it seems also highly incumbent upon us
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to represent most seriously to persons inclined to calumniate ministers in this manner, the injury they do religion, under an appearance of zeal; and if a design of this dark complexion is evidently their motive, reproof, though administered with the sharpest severity, is both just and expedient. It is, indeed, to be apprehended that the licentiousness with which such topics are commonly conversed upon, would never have wandered into such an extravagance, if too patient an ear had not generally been lent to the calumniators of the first
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and most exemplary characters. This may sometimes be owing to a flattering comparison but too artfully drawn between the absent object of animadversion and the hearer; but that man must catch at every vain shadow of commendation who can deign to accept it on such dishonorable terms, who can receive with complacency the sacrifice of a brother's reputation or tacitly assent to a prejudice being sustained by the cause of Christianity, for the sake of a private and temporary gratification.

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The Intention of what has been submitted to You on this subject, is by no means that of proposing to the clergy to bind themselves in a criminal confederacy against the rights and reason of mankind. He must be presumptuous in the highest degree who would dare to hint such a proposal to you; but indeed the present state of religion in this country, the numerous and various attacks on it from sectaries and from heretics; the contrivances against it of deists, minute philosophers, and that numerous class who consider religion as a mere engine

engine of state, are so formidable, that no circumspection can be too acute, no attention too vigilant, no union too strict to obviate their ill effects.

It seems, beyond a doubt that these dangers arise in great measure from abuses of that religious freedom which is established among us ; but the clergy should consider themselves, both separately and collectively, as the guardians of the truth ; it is their office to prevent any unfair violences being committed against it ; against open attacks it will defend itself, but the

traiterous machinations of those who would seduce or weaken its partizans, sow dissensions among them, relax or dissolve the ties of subordination and fellowship that connect them, are of the utmost importance to the cause in which they are engaged, and to the success of their labours in its support. To behold with indifference, to observe with patience, and to animate with encouragement the authors of these designs in the execution of them, are therefore different degrees of treachery, incompatible with the character of a faithful servant of Christ. Those
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who suffer personally from the misrepresentations of our religious establishment, are both, as to number and consequence, of great importance to its prosperity, and indeed the most exposed to these sufferings are men whose station, or whose character should ensure to them the veneration of all, instead of the violence of injustice or the cruelty of insult.

There is no one, it is to be feared, who hath diligently laboured in the important duties of our calling, whose experience of the craft and bitterness of our adversaries doth not convince
him

him of the obligation and necessity we are under of defending the cause of truth, when attacked in the persons of our injured brethren. As for those who are conscious of suffering in that cause, I need only recall to them the words of St. Peter, " If ye suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. Having a good conscience, that whereas they speak evil

evil of you as of evil doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well-doing than from evil-doing."

Little more has been done or attempted in this letter, than to direct your attention to an evil, in the existence and magnitude of which the maturer experience of many of those to whom it is addressed, must have well instructed them. It is the duty of the meanest soldier to apprise his superiors of the movements
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of the enemy, as they appear from his station, and the object to which their approaches are apparently directed: the importance of the information, the danger to be apprehended, and the means of repelling it, their wisdom must determine and their prudence direct. If it may be allowed to conclude from a circumscribed observation of the manners of the present day, it may be presumed that even *that* is not deficient of a proof, that the minds of many of those committed to our charge are alienated from the doctrine which we preach by false and malicious

malicious attacks upon the characters of those ministers on whom they should depend for instruction; that our adversaries, encouraged by their success among the most zealous and best intentioned, prosecute the plan of increasing discord between the teacher and the disciple; and that the utmost vigilance and industry on our part can alone prevent the prevalence of their malignant endeavors to overthrow the whole fabric of religion by gradually weakening the pillars of it.

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The danger having thus been submitted to your consideration, may it please the Almighty of His Infinite Goodness to direct you to the employment of such measures as will effectually counteract the designs and operations of the enemies of His most Holy Name, against the peace and prosperity of His Church.

I am, 5 0059

With the highest Respect

Truly reverend Brethren,

Your affectionate Brother in Christ.

